



DECISION NOTICE
MOONLIGHT RANGE PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE, PLUMAS NATIONAL FOREST,
MT. HOUGH RANGER DISTRICT
PLUMAS COUNTY, CA

LOCATION

The project area is south of Janesville, California about 3 miles and north of Quincy, California about 8 miles on the Mt Hough and Beckwourth Ranger Districts of the Plumas National Forest in Plumas and Lassen Counties, California. The Antelope Allotment is 24,574 acres consisting of three pastures and ranges in elevation from 5,320 feet on Boulder Creek near Hallet Meadow to 7,795 feet on Thompson Peak. The Antelope Lake Allotment is 4,403 acres and ranges in elevation from 4,880 feet on Indian Creek (below the Dam) to 6,560 feet on Ridge near Boulder Creek. The Lights Creek Allotment is 29,929 acres ranges in elevation from 3,760 feet on Cooks Creek to 7,500 feet on Indicator Peak. The Lone Rock Allotment is 24,628 acres and ranges in elevation from 4,368 feet on Lights Creek to 7,596 feet on Red Rock.

The Antelope Allotment is located in all or portions of T27N, R12E, Sections 1-3, 10-13, T27N, R13E, Sections 2-11, 16-20, T28N, R11E, Sections 1, 11-14, 24, T28N, R12E, Sections 6, 8, 9, 13-29, 34-36, T28N, R13E, Sections 19 and 28-34. The Antelope Lake Allotment is located in all or portions of T27N, R12E, Sections 10-15, 22-27, T27N, R13E Sections 18, 19 and 30. The Lights Creek Allotment is located in all or portions of T27N, R10E, Sections 1-5, 8-29, 33-35, T27N R11E, Sections 5-8, 17-19 and 30. The Lone Rock Allotment is located in all or portions of T27N, R11E, Sections 1-4, 10-15, 24, T27N, R12E, Sections 3-10, 16-22, T28N, R11E, Sections 10, 11, 14-16, 21-28, 33-36, T28N, R12E, Sections 19, 20 and 28-34.

DECISION

We have read the Moonlight Range Project Environmental Assessment (EA), reviewed the analysis in the project record including documents incorporated by reference, and fully understand the environmental effects disclosed therein. Based upon our review of all the alternatives we have decided to implement Alternative 2. Alternative 2 best meets the Purpose and Need statements of the Moonlight Range Project as it would: 1) reauthorize livestock grazing on the four allotments, 2) maintain or improve resource conditions in riparian areas, meadows and special aquatic features 3) minimize legacy disturbances on habitat for threatened, endangered and sensitive plant and animal species and their habitats, and 4) through monitoring allows for flexibility in management of areas of concern.

Proposed Actions include authorizing cattle grazing (Table 1), fencing-off selected sensitive areas, and restoring identified meadow systems which could include in-channel stream restoration work, removing failing spring boxes, repairing culverts, removing encroaching trees in meadows, and

revegetation (Table 2 and Table 3 in the EA). A complete list of exclosures and fences are listed in Appendix A of this document.

Table 1. Current and proposed permitted use for the Moonlight Range Project allotments

Allotment	Current Permitted Use (HM)	Current Season of Use	Proposed Action Permitted Use (HM)	Proposed Action Season of Use	Current/Proposed Grazing System
Antelope	612 "on" 61 "off"	June 15 to September 15	612 "on" 61 "off"	May 1 to November 30	Rotational
Antelope Lake	158	September 3 to October 4	158	September 3 to October 4	Rotational
Lights Creek	73 "on" 49 "off"	June 1 to September 1	73 "on" 49 "off"	May 1 to November 30	Continuous
Lone Rock	351 "on" 544 "off"	June 16 to September 15	351 "on" 544 "off"	May 1 to November 30	Continuous

DECISION RATIONALE

We considered a number of different criteria when deciding which alternative to select. No single factor or concern entirely prevailed in determining our choice of alternative selection. The criteria we focused on, because they did differ across alternatives, were meeting the desired conditions or trending in an upward condition related to riparian areas and rangeland health.

Alternative 2 was designed to reduce impacts to riparian areas and special aquatic features (fens), while also gives us more flexibility in managing the allotment. For example, in order to reduce impacts to an important fen complex we chose to fence that system in order to allow for longer grazing periods around the fen complex. In addition, we have added additional adaptive management options in order to allow for more flexibility in management in order to respond appropriately to new issues and/or unexpected outcomes that arise from monitoring results.

Design features in Alternative 2 enable us to meet the requirements of the Biological Opinion for the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog. We chose to continue to fence key occupied suitable habitat within the project area. In addition, meeting standards for utilization in suitable habitat will be critical. End of season monitoring will be required and reported to US Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition, the Forest Service is required to monitor effectiveness of these utilization standards in maintaining suitable habitat and use the findings in an adaptive management process.

ACHIEVEMENT OF PURPOSE AND NEED

Alternative 2 was designed to respond to riparian areas (meadows, fens, stream channels) and wildlife concerns (yellow-legged frog occupied and critical habitat). The activities included in this decision work toward improving stream channel and meadow conditions by working within stream channels to

improve head cuts, fix culverts, revegetate stream banks, and remove encroaching conifers. A complete list of activities can be found on pages 6-16 of the EA.

In order to meet project objectives, the following actions are proposed:

- a. The decision will authorize grazing at existing numbers, but modify the season of use in order to allow for the permittees to have flexibility on their on and off dates (Table 1).
- b. This decision will implement specific resource management measures to improve proper functioning condition within identified meadows, stream reaches and fens. Through adaptive management, we will have the flexibility to modify these treatments (Table 3 in the EA).
- c. Several fences will be constructed to either protect occupied Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog habitat or special aquatic features such as fens (Appendix A).
- d. A new water trough and corral will be constructed in order to help manage cattle movement.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, we considered one other alternatives described in the EA (p. 6).

Alternative 1 (No Action)

Under Alternative 1 (No Action) no livestock grazing would be authorized within the project area, and no range management actions would be implemented (Forest Service Handbook 2209.13, Ch. 92.31).

We did not select Alternative 1 (No Action) because it does not meet the purpose and need identified in the EA (pgs. 3-5), Congressional intent allows grazing on suitable lands where grazing is consistent with other multiple use goals and objectives. Alternative 1 does not meet the Forest Plan Direction to manage livestock to utilize forage while avoiding adverse impacts on soil, vegetation, water quality, wildlife, fisheries and riparian zones (PNF LRMP 1988).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Notice of pending action first appeared in the Plumas National Forest quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) as the Moonlight Range Project in March 15, 2013.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping process started in 2013 with publication of the Proposed Action in the *Feather River Bulletin* and *Portola Reporter* on June 15, 2016. Scoping packets (Proposed Action, figures and maps) were sent to the permittees and to various individuals, organizations, government agencies and federally-recognized Native American Tribes with ancestral territory in or near the project area. The scoping period ended on July 18, 2016. No scoping comments were received.

The 30-day comment period for the Moonlight Range EA began on June 6, 2017. Letters were sent to interested parties, permittees, government agencies and federally recognized Native American Tribes. The 30-day comment period ended on July 7, 2017. No comments were received.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

In addition to the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), I find that this project is consistent with the standards and guidelines for land management activities described in the 1988 Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (PNF LRMP) as amended by the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision. In addition, the Moonlight Range Project complies with the Endangered Species Act (EA, pg. 64) (USFWS Consultation Letter, June 15, 2017), the Clean Water Act (EA, pg. 59), the National Historic Preservation Act (EA, pp. 58-59) and other federal, state, and local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pp. 58-60).

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OPPORTUNITIES

This project is not subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B because no timely specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity were received during any designated opportunity for public comment (36 CFR 218.4).

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Since no timely comments were filed during any designated public comment period (36 CFR 218.4), the approval of a proposed project or activity documented in a DN must be made in accordance with 36 CFR 220.7 (c) and (d).

CONTACT

The Moonlight Range Project Final EA and supporting documents are available for public review at the Plumas National Forest, Mt. Hough Ranger District, 39696 Highway 70, Quincy, CA 95971 and online at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=41559>. It is also possible to navigate to the project website via the Plumas National Forest webpage (www.fs.fed.us/r5/plumas). Select the "Land and Resources Management" tab, then select "Browse through the Forest Projects," and then find the project name. For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Kyla Sabo, Planner, Mt. Hough Ranger District, at 530-283-7619 or kylasabo@fs.fed.us.



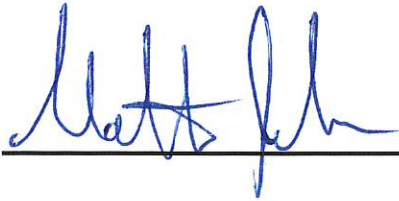
7-19-17

Date

MICKI D SMITH

Mt. Hough District Ranger

Plumas National Forest



7/19/2017
Date

MATTHEW JEDRA
Beckwourth District Ranger
Plumas National Forest

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APPENDIX A

Table 1. Proposed exclosures

Allotment	Improvement Name	Type and number estimate	Builder Responsibility	Maintenance Responsibility	Remarks
			Benefiting Function	Benefiting Function	
Antelope	Meadow 71	Barb wire	USFS	USFS	
	Meadow 72 Lowe Flat	Barb wire	USFS	Permittee	Permittee requested. An exclosure here allows for better distribution of livestock
	Meadow 78	Temp fence	USFS	USFS	active head cuts
	Meadow 79	Temp fence	USFS	USFS	active head cuts
	Meadow 83	Temp fence	USFS	USFS	Old wooden structure Reshape 3 stream channels
	ASP Fen 2 Antelope Allotment	Electric – immediate temporary fence until barbed wire fence is built.	USFS will pay for electric fence – permittee responsible for putting up and down.	Permittee and USFS	Permittee responsible for fence around fen. USFS responsible for larger fence around meadow.
	Meadow 34A	Temp Fence	USFS	USFS	
	Meadow 34B	Temp Fence	USFS	USFS	Permanent fence would be put up if we are seeing a downward trend – then maintained by permittee
	65,87, 89a, 100 (Aspen Exclosures)	Buck and pole	USFS	USFS	
Antelope Lake	1ALP	Barb wire	USFS	USFS	
Lights Creek	Meadow 64	Barb wire	USFS	Permittee	An exclosure here allows utilization of the rest of the allotment.
Lone Rock	Meadow 0B	Barb wire	USFS	permittee	Rebuild existing exclosure, not in permit originally.

Allotment	Improvement Name	Type and number estimate	Builder Responsibility	Maintenance Responsibility	Remarks
			Benefiting Function	Benefiting Function	
	Meadow 1	Barb wire	USFS	USFS	Rebuild enclosure not in permit
	Meadows 10, 11a and 11b	Barb wire	USFS	Permittee	Rebuild enclosures not in permit originally
	Meadow 19 a and b	Slash as enclosure	USFS	USFS	
	Meadow 20 and 20b	Barb wire	USFS	Permittee	Occupied yellow legged frog Multiple headcuts An enclosure here allows utilization of the rest of the allotment
	52	Temp fence as an adaptive management solution	USFS	USFS	Temporarily fence if on a downward trend

Table 2. Proposed Action drift fences, water troughs and corrals

Allotment	Improvement Name	Location	Type and number estimate	Builder Responsibility	Maintenance Responsibility	Remarks
				Benefiting Function	Benefiting Function	
Antelope	South Trough	South pasture		USFS	Permittee	Fill from fire pond
	Drift fence		Barb wire (0.5 miles)	USFS	Permittee	Burned in fire
	Wheeler Corral	Wheeler	Board	USFS	Permittee	New construction
Antelope Lake	Drift fence		Barb wire (4.26 miles)	Range	Permittee	Burned in fire

